

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY TOKYO
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AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH
AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
AMEMBASSY MANILA
AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
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TAGS:PFOR,ASEAN, VS, VN, CB, LA

SUBJECT: THE ASEAN STATES AND INDOCHINA

FOLLOWING IS AN ABSTRACT OF AN INR ANALYSIS.

1. THE FIVE ASEAN STATES (INDONESIA, MALAYSIA, SINGAPORE, THAILAND AND THE PHILIPPINES), WISHING TO EXERCISE AS MUCH CONTROL AS THEY CAN OVER THE DESTINY OF THEIR REGION, SEE COOPERATION AMONG THEMSELVES AND WITH OTHER ASIAN STATES
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AS THE ONLY WAY TO MAKE THEIR INFLUENCE FELT. THEY SEE

INDOCHINA AS PART OF THEIR REGION AND ARE PARTICULARLY ANXIOUS TO PLAY A ROLE IN ASSURING ITS STABILITY.

2. TO THE ASEAN STATES A COMMUNIST NORTH VIETNAM IS AN ACCEPTED FACT OF LIFE. THEY HOPE THAT NEUTRAL, NON-COMMUNIST GOVERNMENTS CAN BE MAINTAINED IN PHNOM PENH, VIENTIANE, AND SAIGON AS BUFFERS, BUT HAVE LONG SINCE RECOGNIZED THE POSSIBILITY THAT ALL OF INDOCHINA MAY COME UNDER HANOI'S CONTROL. THEY BELIEVE THAT HANOI CAN MOST EFFECTIVELY BE PREVENTED FROM BECOMING AN EXPORTER OF COMMUNIST INSURGENCY THROUGH BEING DRAWN INTO REGIONAL ARRANGEMENTS. HENCE, THEY HAVE INCLUDED NORTH VIETNAM IN THEIR APPEALS FOR ALL-ASIA CONFERENCES AND HAVE MADE CLEAR THEIR HOPES THAT, IN DUE COURSE, NORTH VIETNAM WILL AGREE TO JOIN ASEAN AND BECOME PART OF AN EVENTUAL SOUTH-EAST ASIAN NEUTRAL ZONE.

3. AS LONG AS INDOCHINA WAS AN ARENA OF OPEN GREAT POWER STRUGGLE, THE ASEAN STATES FELT POWERLESS TO AFFECT THE COURSE OF EVENTS. ALL THEY COULD DO WAS TO CALL PUBLICLY FROM TIME TO TIME FOR A PEACE CONFERENCE, THEREBY ESTABLISHING ON PRINCIPLE THEIR LEGITIMATE CLAIM TO A VOICE IN THE CRITICAL AFFAIRS OF THEIR REGION. MOREOVER, THEIR DIFFERING ROLES IN THE WAR PERIOD--WITH THAILAND AND THE PHILIPPINES PARTICIPATING AS ALLIES OF SOUTH VIETNAM AND THE UNITED STATES WHILE THE OTHER THREE STATES REMAINED ALOOF--HELPED TO PREVENT AGREEMENT ON ANY JOINT ACTION. EVEN WHEN NEGOTIATIONS FOR A SETTLEMENT GOT UNDERWAY, THEY FELT EXCLUDED FROM DECISIONS WHICH WOULD AFFECT THEM CRITICALLY.

4. FROM 1966 TO 1973, WHEN THE ASEAN STATES WERE ATTEMPTING TO ESTABLISH THEIR RIGHTFUL INTEREST IN THE REGION, THEIR ONLY SUCCESSFUL ACTION WAS THE JAKARTA CONFERENCE OF 1970 AT WHICH ELEVEN STATES CALLED FOR PEACE NEGOTIATIONS AND THE WITHDRAWAL OF ALL FOREIGN TROOPS FROM CAMBODIA, AND DISPATCHED A TRIPARTITE COMMISSION (INDONESIA, MALAYSIA AND JAPAN) AROUND THE WORLD TO PROMOTE THEIR VIEWS. ALTHOUGH WITHOUT EFFECT ON THE COURSE OF HOSTILITIES, THIS WAS A LANDMARK IN ASIAN REGIONAL COOPERATION, CASTING

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JAPAN AND INDONESIA IN LEADERSHIP ROLES AND FOR THE FIRST TIME INCLUDING AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND AS REGIONAL PARTNERS.

5. THE CONCLUSION OF THE AGREEMENT ON VIETNAM IN JANUARY 1973 OSTENSIBLY GAVE THE ASEAN STATES A GREATER OPPORTUNITY TO EXERT THEIR INFLUENCE, FOR NO LONGER WOULD THEY BE IN DANGER OF INVOLVING THEMSELVES IN CONFLICT BETWEEN MAJOR

POWERS. TO DATE, HOWEVER, THEY HAVE BEEN ABLE TO DO NO MORE THAN PARTICIPATE IN AN ASIAN WORKING GROUP AT THE UNITED NATIONS (ONCE AGAIN ADDING JAPAN, AUSTRALIA, AND NEW ZEALAND TO THE ASEAN FIVE) IN OPPOSITION TO A RESOLUTION THAT WOULD SEAT SIHANOUK'S GRUNK IN PLACE OF THE KHMER REPUBLIC. IN THE FACE OF THE SUPPORT SIHANOUK HAD WON IN THE NON-ALIGNED WORLD, HOWEVER, THEY FELT ABLE TO DO NO MORE THAN PREVENT THE RESOLUTION FROM COMING TO A VOTE, THUS POSTPONING THE ISSUE FOR A YEAR.

6. WHILE THEY BELIEVE IN THE UTILITY OF ESTABLISHING A MORAL POSITION, THE ASEAN STATES HAVE PRAGMATICALLY CONCLUDED THAT THEY MUST GET ALONG AS BEST THEY CAN WITH WHATEVER GOVERNMENTS COME TO POWER. THAILAND HAS MADE TENTATIVE CONTACTS WITH NORTH VIETNAM AND BOTH

THAILAND AND THE PHILIPPINES CAN BE EXPECTED TO FOLLOW THEIR THREE ASEAN PARTNERS IN OPENING DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS AT AN APPROPRIATE TIME. LACKING MILITARY STRENGTH THE ASEAN STATES DO NOT WANT TO TAKE POSITIONS THEY ARE UNABLE TO IMPOSE AND WHICH WOULD ADVERSELY AFFECT THEIR RELATIONS WITH HANOI. ON THE CONTRARY, THEY WOULD BE INCLINED TO TRIM THEIR POSITIONS TO ATTRACT HANOI INTO THEIR ORGANIZATION, AND, ALTHOUGH THEY WOULD PREFER NON-COMMUNIST GOVERNMENTS TO SURVIVE ELSEWHERE IN INDOCHINA, THEY WOULD BE PREPARED TO OPEN DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH WHATEVER GOVERNMENT IS CLEARLY IN CONTROL IN SAIGON, VIENTIANE, OR PHNOM PENH AND ACCEPT THE PARTICIPATION OF THAT GOVERNMENT IN THEIR REGIONAL ASSOCIATIONS.

7. WHILE REALIZING THAT THEY HAVE AS YET PLAYED NO ROLE IN DECISION-MAKING IN THE INDOCHINA AREA, THE ASEAN
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STATES TAKE SOME COMFORT IN HAVING KEPT ALIVE SINCE 1966 THE PRINCIPLE THAT THEIR RIGHTFUL INTEREST IN DETERMINING THE FUTURE OF THEIR REGION EXTENDS TO THAT AREA. IN ADDITION, THEY FEEL THEY HAVE HAD SOME SUCCESS IN CREATING MACHINERY FOR JOINT ACTION. INTENSIFICATION OF HOSTILITIES OR A MAJOR NORTH VIETNAMESE OFFENSIVE WOULD ALARM THEM AND BE LIKELY TO PRECIPITATE ANOTHER JOINT EFFORT. HOWEVER, THEY WOULD NOT ATTEMPT DIRECT PRESSURE ON HANOI IF THEY WERE CONVINCED THAT THEIR FUTURE RELATIONS WITH HANOI WOULD BE JEOPARDIZED OR THAT HANOI WOULD PAY NO ATTENTION.

8. FOR ITS PART, HANOI HAS GENERALLY IGNORED ASEAN AND REJECTED ITS EFFORTS TO PLAY A MEDIATING ROLE. FOR THE MOMENT, WHILE SEEKING BETTER BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH ALL

OF ITS SOUTHEAST ASIAN NEIGHBORS, NORTH VIETNAM WILL CONTINUE TO AVOID THE COMPLICATIONS INVOLVED IN DEALING WITH A REGIONAL OR MULTINATIONAL GROUP ON AN ISSUE OF PARAMOUNT NATIONAL INTEREST.

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